



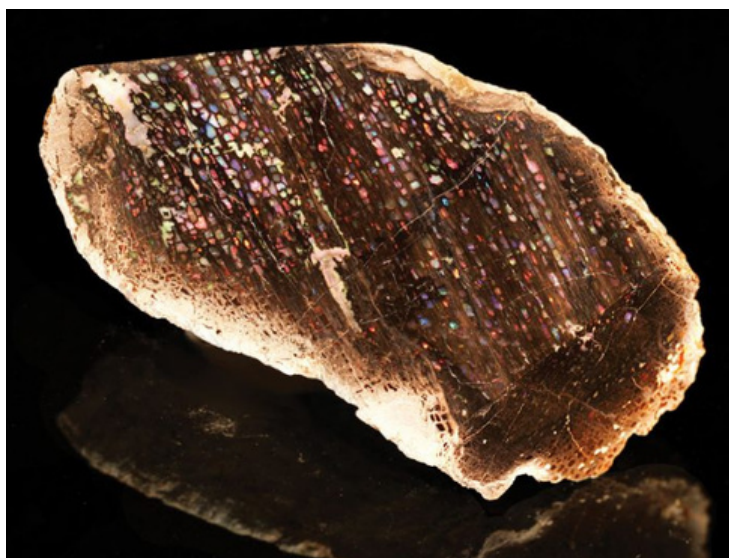
Rock Talk

The Official Newsletter of the Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Exploring the Royal Peacock Opal Mine

Royal Peacock Opal Mine got its start over a century ago. Back then, the cowboys and shearherders in the Virgin Valley of northwest Nevada didn't realize they had a treasure at their feet. They just knew the "sparkling gems" — what we now know as precious opals in black and every color in between — were desired by collectors. According to local history, these collectors traveled to the bars during the cowboys' days off in Cedarville and other Surprise Valley communities to swap the shimmering, glittering gemstones for shots of whiskey.

One of those early buckaroos was Harry L. Wilson, who was born and raised in the Surprise Valley community of Fort Bidwell, and later worked cattle for an enormous, multi-state ranching operation before partnering with a couple of friends in 1925. "They bought homesteads that eventually became consolidated as the Virgin Valley Ranch," says Julie Wilson, granddaughter and third generation to operate the Royal Peacock Mine.



This Month's Roundup of Stories

- [Royal Peacock Opal Mine](#)
- [Secretary's Report](#)
- [Hellcreek Fossil Hunting](#)
- [Prehistoric Grave with Gold Rings](#)
- [Fossil Discovery](#)
- [Rare Crystals at Prehistoric Burial Sites](#)
- [Large Dinosaur Fossil](#)
- [Bench Tips](#)

The appeal of these pretty gems wasn't the reason Harry L. Wilson purchased the nearby opal mine, which they later named the Royal Peacock, in 1944.

It was all because of his wife, Mabel. He was all about the cattle and the horses, but she liked the "sparkle and bling."

Beyond the beauty of the opals, this entire region is a world of its own. "The Virgin Valley is remote, but it was genuinely nestled in the boondocks in the 1950s.

There was no electricity until 1968 or telephone service until 1970. For years, my grandparents operated a cattle ranch and raised horses. It became surrounded by the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, which was created in 1931."

Read the entire article at [RocknGem.com](https://www.rockngem.com)

Clubhouse Address:
3357 Susan Dr.
Spring Hill, FL 34606

Secretary's Report

Minutes and More from Club Secretary - Melodye Steverson

Withlacoochee Rockhounds Monthly Meeting

Date 8/10/2022

Minutes

The meeting was called to order by President Judith Birx at 7 pm.

We all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silent prayer.

There were 2 new members to recognize: Leah Mafeony, and Linda Prater.

There were 2 guests in attendance; Brandi Miller, and Susan O'Brian.

Erik Ulano made a motion to accept the minutes of our July meeting as printed in the newsletter, Roberta Oldread seconded. Passed by all members.

Treasurer Janet Wheeler gave the Treasurer's report. Roberta Oldread made a motion to accept the Treasurer's report subject to audit. Seconded by Roger Wheeler. Approved by all.

President Birx began by asking Gem Show Co-Chairman Janice Wojcik for a report on the vendor applications she had been working on. She said they were almost ready and she would email them out to vendors on the list. She said if they didn't respond to the email, she would mail the applications out.

Janice also stated that she will contact Channel 13's Charlie Belcher on September 1st to request that he would cover our Gem Show for Channel 13 news.

President Birx continued, regarding the Gem Show, saying that we need members to volunteer if we are to make a success of the show.

She reminded members that the number of volunteer hours worked is a big consideration when the Board of Directors are deciding which applicant will be awarded one of the annual scholarships to the William Holland School of Lapidary Arts.

Janice Wojcik stood and announced that she and Pamela Gonzalez would be teaching another Basic Silversmithing class on August 27th. If needed, they will teach another basic class, but if not, they will move on to Silversmithing 2 later in the Fall.

She also stated that the "Cabelot" meeting program we had in July was such a success that we will do it again, possibly before the end of the year. She also mentioned that Pam Gonzalez will present a program on fluorescent minerals soon.

President Birx reminded members that our club does not sponsor any field trips that are not sanctioned by the SFMS and are listed on their website or in their newsletter. We may provide dates, times, and locations where the public will be able to dig/mine, but members choose to do so at their own risk.

Graves Mountain will be open for digging on November 7th & 8th.

Roger Wheeler made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Roberta Oldread seconded, and passed by all. The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Melodye Steverson.

Withlacoochee Rockhounds Board of Directors

Meeting Minutes

Date 8/17/2022

Attending Board members; Judith Birx, Janice Wojcik, Melodye Steverson, Janet Wheeler, Ralph Barber, Roberta Oldread, Ginny Steverson, Roger Wheeler and Michael Steverson.

Board meeting started at 6:50pm and was held via the Internet on Zoom.

Continued on [page 8](#)



Hellcreek FOSSIL HUNTING

At the Withlacoochee Rockhounds meeting on September 14, 2022, member and former VP Mark Moore will present an interactive Fossil Hunting program. Members will get a sample box of Hellcreek matrix dirt collected in Montana and will search for small, 66 million-year-old fossils like vertebrae, fish scales and dino teeth.

It's your chance to become a real paleontologist for one night. Everything will be provided - even the magnifying glass. Put on your pith helmet and come and enjoy the dig!



Researchers Find Prehistoric Grave Containing 169 Gold Rings

There's gold in them hills!

Archaeologists Have Uncovered a Prehistoric Grave Containing 169 Gold Rings Near The BIHARIA COMMUNE In Bihor County, Crisana, Romania.

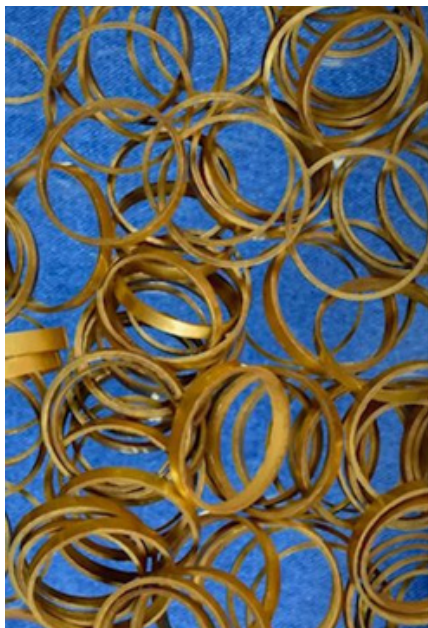
The discovery was made during construction works for a new road that connects the city of Oradea with the A3 highway. Excavations were conducted from March till the end of June by a multi-national team representing institutions from across Romania and Hungary, revealing three sites from the Neolithic Period, two from the middle to late Bronze Age, two from the Roman Period, and two sites from the Middle Ages. In a press release announced by the Tarii Crisurilor Museum, archaeologists excavating near Biharia found the grave of a woman belonging to the Tiszapolgár culture.

Dr. Călin Ghemiș from the Tarii Crisurilor Museum who led the team described how the woman was buried with 169 gold rings that adorned her hair, along with a multi-spiral copper bracelet, two golden beads, and around 800 beads made from bone.

Based on an initial study of the teeth and stature of the deceased, it is believed that the burial was of a high-status woman. This is further supported by the lack of weapons normally associated with male burials from the Tiszapolgár culture.

Samples have been sent to labs in Romania and the Netherlands to obtain more accurate dating through a carbon-14 analysis, in addition to DNA sampling and further anthropological studies.

Read the entire article at [HeritageDaily.com](https://www.heritagedaily.com/2022/06/prehistoric-grave-containing-169-gold-rings-near-biharia-romania/)



Fossil discovery substantially rewrites the history of life on Earth

History....it's so historic!

For the study, published in Science Advances, the research team analyzed a fist-sized rock from Quebec, Canada, estimated to be between 3.75 and 4.28 billion years old.

In an earlier Nature paper, the team found tiny filaments, knobs, and tubes in the rock which appeared to have been made by bacteria.

However, not all scientists agreed that these structures – dating about 300 million years earlier than what is more commonly accepted as the first sign of ancient life – were of biological origin.

Now, after extensive further analysis of the rock, the team have discovered a much larger and more complex structure – a stem with parallel branches on one side that is nearly a centimetre long – as well as hundreds of distorted spheres, or ellipsoids, alongside the tubes and filaments.

The researchers say that, while some of the structures could conceivably have been created through chance chemical reactions, the “tree-like” stem with parallel branches was most likely biological in origin, as no structure created via chemistry alone has been found like it.

The team also provides evidence of how the bacteria got their energy in different ways. They found mineralized chemical by-products in the rock that are consistent with ancient microbes living off iron, sulphur and possibly also carbon dioxide and light through a form of photosynthesis not involving oxygen.

These new findings, according to the researchers, suggest that a variety of microbial life may have existed on primordial Earth, potentially as little as 300 million years after the planet formed.

Read the entire article at
[TheBrighterSideNews.com](https://www.brightersideneeds.com)



Prehistoric Brits used rare rock crystals to mark burial sites, research finds

Distinctive and rare rock crystals were moved over long distances by Early Neolithic Brits and were used to mark their burial sites, according to groundbreaking new archaeological research.

Evidence for the use of rock crystal—a rare type of perfectly transparent quartz which forms in large hexagonal gems—has occasionally been found at prehistoric sites in the British Isles, but little investigation has previously been done specifically into how the material was used and its potential significance.

A group of archaeologists from The University of Manchester worked with experts from the University of Cardiff and Herefordshire County Council on a dig at Dorstone Hill in Herefordshire, a mile south of another dig at Arthur's Stone. There, they studied a complex of 6000-year-old timber halls, burial mounds and enclosures from the Early Neolithic period, when farming and agriculture arrived in Britain for the first time.

As well as a range of artifacts including pottery, stone implements and cremated bones, they uncovered rock crystal which had been knapped like the flint at the site, but unlike the flint, it had not been turned into tools such as arrow heads or scrapers—instead, pieces were intentionally gathered and deposited within the burial mounds. The experts say the material was deposited at the site over many generations, potentially for up to 300 years.

Read the entire article at [Phys.org](https://www.phys.org)



Field Trips

"Note: The Withlacoochee Rockhounds Club does not sponsor field trips other than trips that are sanctioned by the SFMS (The Southeast Federation of Mineralogical Societies).

Our club insurance is through SFMS and does not cover excursions not listed on their website as safe."

Ancient Colossus Unearthed in Portugal May Be Largest Dinosaur Ever Found in Europe

That's a big dinosaur!

Paleontologists in Portugal have unearthed the fossilized skeleton of what could be the largest dinosaur ever found in Europe.

The remains are thought to be those of a sauropod, a herbivorous dinosaur 12 meters (39 feet) tall and 25 meters long that roamed the Earth around 150 million years ago.

"It's one of the biggest specimens discovered in Europe, perhaps in the world," paleontologist Elisabete Malafaia, from the Faculty of Sciences at Lisbon University, told AFP on Monday.

The bones were uncovered by Portuguese and Spanish scientists in the garden of a house near Pombal in central Portugal at the beginning of August.

Among the bones collected, they found the remains of a rib about three meters long, Malafaia said.

Fossil fragments were first noticed at the site in 2017, when the owner was digging up his garden to make way for an extension.

He contacted paleontologists, who unearthed part of the dinosaur skeleton earlier this month and have been examining it ever since.

Sauropods have characteristically long necks and tails and are among the largest animals to have ever lived.

The fossils discovered at the Monte Agudo site in Pombal are thought to be those of a brachiosaurid who lived during the Upper Jurassic period.

The fact that the vertebrae and ribs were found at the same location and in the position they would have been in the dinosaur's anatomy is "relatively rare", Malafaia said.

The team may conduct more digs in the coming months at the site and in the surrounding area.

Note: This was the entire article from [ScienceAlert.com](https://www.sciencealert.com/ancient-colossus-unearthed-in-portugal-may-be-largest-dinosaur-ever-found-in-europe)



President Birx asked Vice President Wojcik about flyers and posters for the Gem Show. She replied that she had already designed postcards, posters, and handouts. She wants to have them printed and knows of a company in Tampa that she can use. She asked for a budget to get the printing done. She said that she could have 500 postcards printed for \$49. She said that she would probably need \$300 for all of the printed advertising. Michael Steverson made a motion to allow Janice Wojcik to spend up to \$300 as needed for Gem Show advertising. Roberta Oldread seconded, all approved.

President Birx said she thought we could use more signs this year and would like to get two more of the A-frame signs that we got last year. Discussion ensued and we decided we need one SR 52, 19, and Hudson Avenue, and another at a location to be determined at future meetings. We will also get more small signs on steel frames that we can stick in the ground at other locations. Ms Wojcik will check with a company in Tampa on coroplast signs and get back with the Board.

VP Wojcik will contact Channel 13 to try to get Charlie Belcher to come to our Gem Show. She will contact him on September 1. President Birx asked about demonstrations to show him while he is there. We will try to have someone cutting cabs, making jewelry, and someone talking about fossils. Details will be worked out at the next meeting.

President Birx reported that the silversmithing class had been approved by Senior Center Board Member Carol Babbicz, at which time VP Wojcik said she needed to get more silver. President Birx told her to order it because she still had not spent all of the money she was allotted for the classes.

President Birx asked Secretary Steverson about the Pixie machine that is not running. She said she was looking for a motor and the only ones she could find were \$400-500 each. She is trying to contact the company that makes the motor to see if she can get it cheaper, but they have not yet responded. She will continue to try to find a motor for a reasonable price.

President Birx then asked VP Wojcik about programs for the next few months. She replied that Mark Moore will be doing a program in September on fossils, Pam Gonzalez will be doing a program in October on fluorescent minerals, and in November we will "Return to Cabelot".

President Birx asked past president Ralph Barber if he had anything scheduled for food at the Gem show. He said not yet but was open to suggestions. After much discussion regarding Boy Scouts, Lions Club, JROTC, and Girl Scouts, we tabled this discussion until the next Board meeting. In the meantime, several board members are going to put feelers out to see if we can get anyone to do food for the Gem Show.

There was a quick discussion on Rockhound patches and t-shirts that was tabled until the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Secretary Melodye Steverson

Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Our monthly club meeting is held at the Weeki Wachee Senior Citizens Club, 3357 Susan Dr., Spring Hill, FL 34606, on the 2nd Wednesday of each month from 7:00 to 9:00 PM

www.withlacoocheerockhounds.com



Your Business Card Size Ad in Rock Talk

The cost for non-club members to advertise their businesses in Rock Talk is \$10.00 per month. Contact Michael Steverson to set up an ad in both the newsletter and the club website. It will benefit both your business and our club.

Advertisers Needed

Please help us find advertisers for the Rock Talk and our website. The club can use the monthly income. Both the Rock Talk and our website have more exposure than only club members

Contact club treasure Janet Wheeler: ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com or send to: Withlacoochee Rockhounds, PO Box 5634, Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634

Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Purpose

We are a non-profit organization whose purpose is to foster interest and promote knowledge of minerals, gems, fossils, lapidary arts, and earth sciences, through regular meetings, informative programs, workshops, and field trips. PLUS, our annual gem, mineral and jewelry show.

Membership is open to anyone sharing such interests.

Dues

Dues are \$25.00 annually for adults, and \$5.00 for children under 18 years of age.

Club Meeting Location and time

Weeki Wachee Senior Citizens Center, 3357 Susan Dr in Spring Hill. The meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at 7:00PM

2022 Club Officers and Appointees

President	Judith Birx	352.587.1702	judithbirx@hotmail.com
Vice President	Janice Wojcik	813.677.6263	jfwojcik@verizon.net
Secretary	Melodye Steverson	352.683.9496	melodye@designsbymelodye.com
Treasurer	Janet Wheeler	727.938.3644	ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com
Rock Talk Editor	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com
Club Webmaster	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com
Mailing Reporter	Janet Wheeler	727.938.3644	ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com
Gem Bag Coordinator	Gloria DuPont	352.848.5199	ddupont@tampabay.rr.com
Audio/Visual Coordinator	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com

Board of Directors

Judith Birx (President) Janice Wojcik (Vice President) Melodye Steverson (Secretary) Janet Wheeler (Treasurer)
 Roberta Oldread (2022) Virginia Steverson (2022- Interim) Roger Wheeler (2022- Interim) Michael Steverson (2022) Ralph Barber (Past President)



Bench Tips from Brad Smith

Brad Smith's *Bench Tips* are a monthly feature of Rock Talk

SILVER DISCOLORATION

Working with jewelry involves an ever increasing number of skills. Chemistry is one of them that comes into play when dealing with a discoloration on the metal caused by a chemical reaction between it and the environment.

In the case of Sterling silver, there are three discolorations we typically encounter: a tarnish, a firescale, and a firestain. Each is different in its cause, in its cure, and in its prevention. All three have to do with components of the Sterling alloy (92.5% silver and 7.5% copper) and how they react with oxygen and the heat of soldering or with pollutants in the air over the long term. Firescale and firestain also occur in 14k or 18k gold because of the copper content.

Tarnish is a grayish coating that builds up slowly on the surface as a result of a reaction of the silver with sulfur-based compounds in the air. Typically these are pollutants from the burning of petroleum fuels, but they can come from other sources as well. I once tarnished all the silver in my display case by putting a pretty specimen of iron pyrite in with the jewelry. Turns out pyrite has sulfur in it!

Sulfur from air pollution or any other source combines with the silver to form a grayish silver sulfide film on the surface. Preventing tarnish involves keeping sulfur away from the metal. Plastic bags will help, and anti-tarnish strips are available from jewelry supply companies to pack near your items. Tarnish is easily removed by hand polishing with a jeweler's cloth or with one of the products sold for cleaning the good silverware for holiday dinner.

Another way is to remove it chemically. Put a piece of aluminum in the bottom of a dish large enough to contain your piece. Heat enough water to cover the silver. Mix in 2 tablespoons of sodium carbonate per cup of water and pour into the dish. Be sure the silver touches the aluminum. Sodium carbonate is the main ingredient in washing soda. Read the labels in grocery and hardware stores.

The second type of tarnish is called firescale. It is the dark gray to charcoal colored film that forms on Sterling or other copper alloys like brass or bronze when we heat it with a torch. The copper in the alloy reacts with oxygen in the air to form a dark cupric oxide coating on the surface. Luckily, the oxide is easily removed by dissolving it in a mild acid - generally called a pickle. It's important that we not let firescale form on a solder joint because it will block the flow solder over the joint.

There are two ways to prevent firescale. Most common is to use a flux, a borax-based solution applied to the metal before soldering. When melted, borax forms a thin glassy layer that keeps oxygen away from the metal. A second way is to do your soldering on a charcoal block. Together with the flame, charcoal greatly reduces the amount of oxygen in the area being soldered. In either case, oxygen is prevented from reaching the metal, so no cupric oxide firescale is formed.

A second oxide can also be formed when soldering copper or a high copper content alloy like bronze or brass. It's called cuprous oxide and is reddish in color. That's why a black looking piece you put in the pickle sometimes comes out red. Problem is that while the black cupric oxide is dissolved by a pickle, the red cuprous oxide is not. The discoloration can be sanded or polished off, but an easier way is to use a "super pickle". This is a mixture of fresh pickle with a healthy shot of hydrogen peroxide from the local store.

I've saved the worst form of discoloration, firestain, for last. Think of firescale (above) as like getting dirt on your shirt that you have to wash off. Firestain is like getting ink on it. The discoloration is not just on the surface, it seeps down and stains the material. Firestain happens when we heat a piece of silver too hot, too long, and/or too many times.

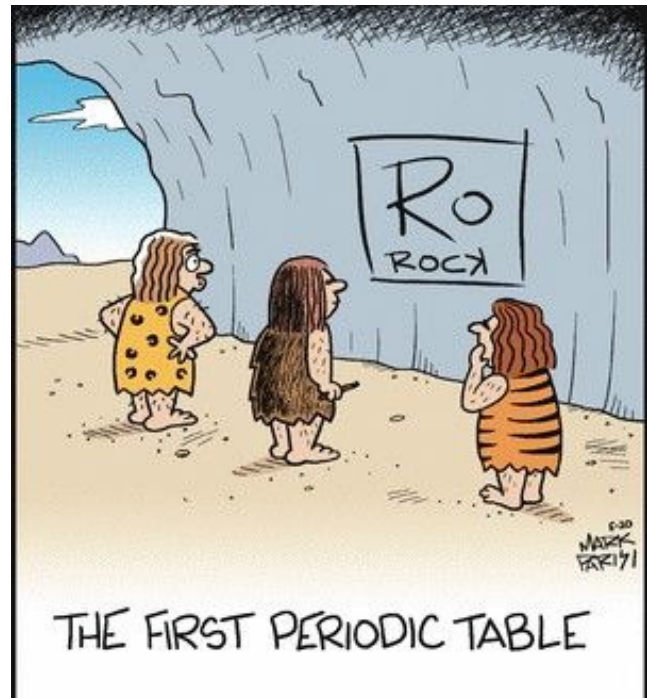
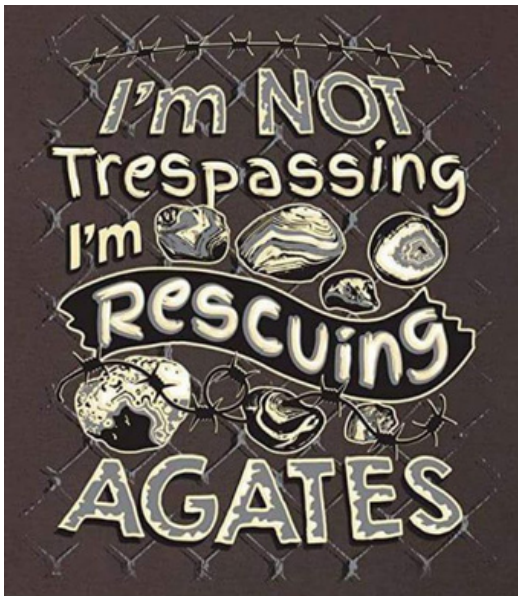
Firestain occurs when the oxides start to build up below the surface of the metal. You generally don't notice it until after polishing. It appears as a darker area of the surface and is easy to spot when viewed under light bounced off a piece of white paper. Because firestain is below the surface, there's no easy bench tip solution. Depletion gilding may work for some pieces. Otherwise, removing it calls for sandpaper and aggressive polishing.

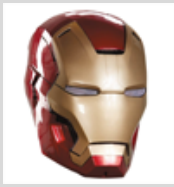
A much better approach for a piece that will require a large number of solderings is to protect the metal from developing firestain by applying liberal amounts of a firecoat. Regular soldering flux will provide some protection but is not as effective as preparations made specifically for the task. Jewelry supply companies offer several commercial solutions, but my favorite is the Prips mixture. I use it every time I intend to do more than two solderings on a piece.

Learn New Skills with Brad's "How To Do It" Books

[Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith](https://www.amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith)

Rock Talk Funny Papers





From The Editor

Hello to all Withlacoochee Rockhounds

It is I, your friendly neighborhood editor again.

If you missed our July meeting, you missed a lot, you missed Jurassic Rocks. Our upcoming September meeting will be Fossil Hunting, presented by our past Vice President, Mark Moore. Mark will be giving a presentation about fossil hunting at Hellcreek. Plus he will have some specimens to view. Don't miss it!

Janice Wojcik and Pam Gonzalez held another Silversmithing class. Great turnout and students left with their creations. Thank you, Janice and Pam!

Our YouTube channel presently has 89 subscribers. At 100 subscribers, I can obtain us what is known as a vanity URL from YouTube. What this means is that the web address for our channel can be something like <https://www.youtube.com/withlacoocheerockhounds>. It is very good for helping people find our channel and our club! So, if you are not a subscriber yet, please subscribe. And tell your friends and family, and have them subscribe!

If you would like to place a business card ad in the newsletter, please feel free to contact me, and we'll get you added to the next available issue.

Additionally, if any of you have not received your newsletter or are not receiving my e-mail blasts (meetings, rock sales, etc.), *please* check your spam folder. If you still are not receiving them, please contact me, and let's make sure I have your correct e-mail address. I have a few of you who unsubscribed from the mailings. I cannot add you back to the list. You have to subscribe to get back on the list. It's a permissions thing.

Our Board would like our members to come up with suggestions for Programs to be presented at our monthly meetings. What would you like to see? What would you like to learn? What would you like to know? Is there something you'd like to teach or present? You can help our club expand its educational repertoire. We'd love to hear from you all.

Contact any Board member or bring your written suggestions to a meeting.

Rock On!!!

Club Phone Number - 352.587.2714

Warning to Withlacoochee Rockhound Members

During the last several months, illicit requests have been sent to members of various clubs in the US, including the Withlacoochee Rockhounds, asking members to purchase gift cards that would be used as donations to various organizations.

These are SCAMS.


Be advised that our club has never and will never ask members to buy gift cards or provide any form of monetary funds to anyone or any organization by phone call, email, or any other method of communication.

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Your Business Card Size Ad in Rock Talk

The cost for non-club members to advertise their businesses in
Rock Talk is \$10.00 per month.

Contact Michael Stevenson to set up an ad in both the newsletter and
the club website. It will benefit both
your business and our club.

If you ad has a web address, or Etsy shop address, I have linked to it.

Advertisers Are Needed

Please help us find advertisers for the Rock Talk and our website.

The monthly income from these ads is beneficial to the club.

Both the Rock Talk and our website have more exposure than only club members.

Contact club treasurer Janet Wheeler: ceecgirl@tampabay.rr.com or
send to:

Withlacoochee Rockhounds
PO Box 5634 Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634

Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Membership Form

2022

Annual Dues: Individual member, \$25.00. Under 18 years of age, \$5.00.

☐

Check if returning member

☐

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☐

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Please Print Clearly

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You may now fill in the fields on this form if you are viewing it on your computer or tablet.
Each field may be clicked on and then you may type in your information.
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Give this completed form along with your check for dues made out to "Withlacoochee Rockhounds" to club secretary Janet Wheeler at a club meeting. Or mail the form and your check to:

Withlacoochee Rockhounds
PO Box 5634
Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634

2022